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CHILE: A nationwide strike by retail merchants has led to violence in Santiago.

Long discontented with declining profit margins, small retailers seized upon the death of a store owner in remote Punta Arenas as the pretext for a nationwide demonstration yesterday. Many stores, including food markets, remained closed on Monday. Crowds gathered in Santiago as police attempted to order owners to reopen stores, and a general melee erupted. No deaths had been recorded as crowds began to disperse late last evening. Punta Arenas has been turned over to military control after five days of a general strike, but the government has denied rumors that a similar "state of emergency" has been declared for Santiago.

The opposition political parties appear to have been surprised by the success of the strike. The Christian Democrats have called for a demonstration tomorrow, and their radio station in Santiago is actively encouraging the strike. Some paramilitary units of the pseudo-fascist Fatherland and Freedom Movement were also active in the street fighting.

Allende in this case has the law on his side, and may use the opportunity to enforce more centralized control in the distribution of food. The strikers, however, will be tenacious opponents and the government will be hard put to even begin to solve the economic problems that lie at the root of the strike.

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